

# The Power of the Prophetic Word

*Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to Ezra 5. Good to be back today. We were out of town last week visiting our daughter up at Boyce College Southern Seminary and she's in her freshman year at the college. A good visit. Patti and I and Jon enjoyed our time up there and she's loving school. She's not nearly struggling as much as we are at home. Isn't that funny how the kids, I think that's the way it is. They're excited to be doing new things and what the Lord is doing in their lives and we're left to deal with an empty space at the table and that kind of thing. But the Lord is good, he knows what he's doing and so it's good to be back here. I appreciate Ken preaching last Sunday and now to be back here in town on my wife's birthday today, Patti's birthday. I don't know why that was funny, actually. I missed it. Tell me that later, honey, why.

Anyway we're back in Ezra and we're looking at the same passage we looked at two weeks ago with a very similar, with the exact same outline. I may change the order but because the main point of Ezra 5:1-6:14 is really the impact of the word of God, our need for it, the sufficiency of it, and so last time we called the outline the perfection of the prophetic word, today the power of the prophetic word. The power of the prophetic word. That's the theme of this morning's message.

Now to remind us and if you weren't here, we're talking about the book, we're studying the book of Ezra-Nehemiah which this particular passage recounts for us the story of the people of Israel after their return from the Babylonian exile and the text we're looking at today concerns the year 520 BC. Now they had returned 16 years earlier, the previous chapters told us. They arrived in the land in 536 BC and they'd been there for over 16 years now. They started when they came home in 536, they came with a commission to build the temple. They came with great joy. They came with expectancy. They came with amazement because they came at the command of Cyrus the great, the Persian Emperor who had defeated the Babylonians and one of the first things he did was to send them back to rebuild the temple. He ordered them to do it. What a mighty act of God that in itself was.

Then 50,000, it's a relatively small number of those who had been exiled but still a significant number, 50,000, nearly 50,000 return under the leadership of Zerubbabel the prince, and Joshua the high priest. They return with high expectations from Babylon,

from Persia, from Susa, the various places there scattered over in the East, they return with great expectation, high hopes, enthusiasm, joy to begin the work on rebuilding the temple, to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem to restore worship; to rebuild the city of Jerusalem, their hopes are to rebuild the walls; to rebuild their homes; to rebuild their lives.

They arrive in the land. Shortly after they arrive, they as one man go to Jerusalem and in great joy they rebuild the altar and began offering sacrifices again which was a pivotal moment. Great joy in that moment of now knowing that they have atoned for their sins in accordance with at that time in redemptive history, the way God intended to deal with our sin.

They then next order the materials and then began the process of building. When the materials arrive, they build the foundation of the temple with, again, great joy though there's a mixed emotion, some of the older people are saddened by the smallness of the temple, but in general there's great enthusiasm to the work. Let's get to work on what God has called us to do. And yet then suddenly opposition arises. The local authorities, the people of the land rise up in opposing their work. The opposition is fierce with the result that the work grinds to a halt, a complete standstill. This work stoppage lasts for more than 15 years. All of that expectancy, all of those hopes, all of those aspirations dashed. They wonder what is God up to in our lives. They're stuck. No progress for 15 years.

The author then wants us to see that the turning point, the thing that changes everything is when God raises up two prophets. He puts his word in their mouths and they go and speak that word to God's people and everything changes. That is the main point of this passage and it is to communicate to us that the people of God always more than anything else always need the word of God. "Man should not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." This is the message that we are seeing lived out in the lives of God's people in the sixth century BC as they return to Jerusalem.

Let's look at, we're gonna read the whole passage in pieces but to help us with the flow we're gonna start with verse 24 of chapter 4 and read the first two verses of chapter 5, then we'll pray, then we'll work through the rest of the passage as we go. Chapter 4, verse 24,

24 Then work on the house of God in Jerusalem ceased, and it was stopped until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

1 When the prophets, Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them, 2 then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak arose and began to rebuild the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them supporting them.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, we ask that now that You might put Your word through this time of study in our hearts that You might send forth Your word and that it might do its work, its mighty work in the souls of everyone here today that we might all be changed, that Christ might be exalted and that He might be everything to us. We pray in His wonderful name. Amen.*

The first thing that we have to see and be reminded of is the necessity of the prophetic word. Three points this morning. First point, the necessity of the prophetic word, how utterly necessary the prophetic word is. It changes everything. No work going on for 15 years, God raises up two prophets, Haggai, Zechariah. We noted last time the emphasis on the word "prophets," when the prophets Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the prophet prophesied, that is, the prophet is the one who has the word of God put in his mouth and so God gives his message to his people through the human voice. This is the way God has chosen to speak to us and we have the recorded messages of the prophets and the apostles. This is the living word of God given to us through God-ordained, God-called, God-filled prophets and apostles and the work is complete. We have the whole testimony of God in the Bible, the 66 books.

So here these people in that circumstance, what they needed was to hear the word of God directly spoken to them at their point of need. God raised up a prophet, he gives that prophet the message to deliver to his people, they deliver the message, and that message, that word from God changes everything. That's the point in verses 1 and 2. The prophets prophesied, then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, Jeshua the son of Jozadak," verse 2, arose and began to rebuild the house of God which is in Jerusalem and the prophets of God were with them supporting them. The prophets of God keep on prophesying. When you look at Haggai and Zechariah's prophesies, you see that. Essentially what's gonna happen and I'll just give you this little bit of an outline, when you look at Haggai and Zechariah, they date their prophesies. They'll say something like, "The word of the Lord came to Haggai in the second year of Darius and the sixth month on the first day saying," and they'll give a prophesy. Then they'll say, "The word of the Lord came to Haggai in the second year, on the seventh month, or on the sixth month and the 24<sup>th</sup> day." Now anyway, it's not that actually. The word of the Lord came on the sixth month, the first day, and then it comes again the seventh month, but in between he tells you that on the 24<sup>th</sup> day of the sixth month the word came, he preaches and he says essentially, "Hey, guys, the reason everything's a mess in our lives is because we quit working on the temple. Get back to work." Then he says on the 24<sup>th</sup> day of that sixth month Zerubbabel and Jeshua begin the work. You see, the word of God, this is what Haggai tells you in chapter 1, starts the work. Then in the seventh month, a month later, almost a month later, he comes with another message which is basically saying, "Don't be discouraged. Be courageous. Take courage." It's exactly what they needed to hear. Then Zechariah we find out on the 11<sup>th</sup> month of that same year starts prophesying himself, or the 8<sup>th</sup> month and then the 11<sup>th</sup> month. We need a chart, don't we? I've been working on that actually. I think I'm gonna use a visual aid soon. Pray for visual aid blessings because I don't have that. I'm getting help though. Anyway.

So but the point is God raises up the prophet Haggai, he brings a message, "Get to work," they get to work, he says, "Keep up the courage." Zechariah comes and he says, his first message is, "Repent and return to the Lord. The problem is we have not been surrendered to God. We need to repent of our sin, repent of our selfishness and return to the Lord and he will return to you." Then he gives a message which also speaks directly to their needs. Last time we talked about Haggai's message, today I want to talk about Zechariah's message as we go through the outline because the author of Ezra really invites us to by telling us it was all about what Haggai and Zechariah prophesied that made the difference. In fact, he emphasizes it, if you turn over to chapter 6, verse 14, he summarizes what happens, "And the elders of the Jews were successful in building through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo." They were successful in building the temple, "And they finished building according to the command of the God of Israel and the decree of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia." Listen, what made the difference was the word of God. What will make the difference in our lives is always, always the word of God.

We saw this, I'm teaching a study on Wednesday nights in Genesis 1-11 and we've been looking at Genesis 1 for the last two weeks and it became clear in a new way to me in just really digging in that passage the necessity of the word of God. Now I want you to think about, many of you, probably all of you have read Genesis 1 at some point, I'm just going to remind you of it and talk through it a second. Essentially what happens is the Bible says the Lord made the heavens and the earth and the next thing he says is the earth was formless and void and darkness was over the surface of the waters. So what happens is, apparently what he's saying is that when God began creation, the first thing he did was make the earth and all the heavens, all the galaxies and all of that, or he makes outer space, okay? Actually there's no galaxies yet. Earth and outer space. Heavens and earth. And he says the earth was formless and void and darkness was over the surface of the waters. The idea in the formless and void, though the Lord's in the process of making it, what that word "formless" means "chaotic; disordered." God in the intermediate of making it, his initial process of making, he leaves it initially without order and structure. That's what "formless" means, but it's not just formless it's also void. "Void" means "utterly empty." There's nothing there. The earth is formless and void. It's chaotic and it is empty and it is characterized by darkness. Darkness is over the surface of the waters.

And what are the next words? Then God said. Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. You walk through the days of creation, each day begins with those three words in English. It's actually one word, well, it's two words in Hebrew. He said, "God," is how it is in Hebrew. The first word in Hebrew, you can turn the order around in Hebrew like we can in English, he said, "God." It's "said." He said. He spoke. He spoke and what happens? He speaks, "Let there be light," and there was light. The next, on day 2 he says the first thing when day 2 begins, then God said, "Let the expanse above be separated from the expanse below that the waters above be separated from the waters below," and it was so. Day 3, "Let the dry land appear and seas be separated." So what you have in day 2 is you have the skies and the seas made, separated. Day 1, light. Day 2, skies and sea. Day 3, dry land and the seas. Day 4, 5, and 6, days 1-3 God is forming, he's bringing order. Remember I said it's formless and void. Days 1-3 are addressing the

formlessness. How does God bring form? How does God bring order to chaos? His word. He speaks into chaos and order comes. Days 4, 5 and 6, I mentioned day 1, if you would draw it like a chart, day 1, day 2, day 3, day 4, day 5, day 6. Day 1 God makes light. Day 4 what does he do? He fills the sky with the sun, the moon and the stars. Do you see how light now is filled. Day 2, he makes the skies and the seas. Day 5 he creates birds and fish. Do you see that? Filling the sky and the sea. Day 3 he makes dry land. Day 6 he makes all the animals on dry land and man. He forms and he fills but the key thing that is there is everything that he does, he speaks and it happens.

So what does that tell us? When you have, when you and I have chaos, disorder, confusion, when we have emptiness, darkness, what do we need? We need God to speak to us. We need God to speak specifically to us and this happens in the pages of Scripture. It happens when someone, often it happens when someone else tells you what God's word and how it applies to your problem. Preaching, teaching, but also one-on-one ministry of the word where the Lord then puts his words in someone else's mouth and they speak to you. Isn't it amazing how so often I've had this thought, someone will tell me something and it really is so helpful and I will somewhere along the way think, "I already knew that but I needed to hear it from you today. I knew it and I didn't know it. Thank you for sharing it."

The necessity of the word. The word is that which takes that which is formless and it brings structure and order. It takes that which is empty and it brings fullness. Look at the language that God uses in Genesis 1. He says the waters were teeming with fish. He didn't just make a few fish, teeming with fish and all kinds of things. The birds are filling the skies. Look at the fullness that God's word brings.

So that's the necessity of the word. Here again, that's the theme in this passage. The word, that what was missing was the word of God. They had a sense of what they were to do but they did not have God speaking to them and all, everything changes when God puts his words in the mouth of Haggai and Zechariah. That's the necessity of the prophetic word, the first point. But the second point is the specificity of the prophetic word. The same exact outline as two weeks ago.

Now we said then, I want to remind you, God raises up a prophet and gives him his word for his people at a specific point of need, and I said this, I said a specific message, God gives a specific message, through a specific man, to a specific people, at a specific time, with specific problems. That is the giving of the Bible. God gives a specific message, to a specific man, through a specific man, to a specific people, at a specific time, with specific problems. God looks at his people, their problems, he raises up a man, puts his message in that man's mouth, and that man gives that message to those people. That's what the 66 books of the Bible are, every one of them given by a prophet speaking to people with unique challenges, unique circumstances and God's word spoken to them.

So we see that in Haggai and Zechariah. Haggai is very, just to summarize real quickly what we talked about from him last time, he's more of just the straight talker. You know, "Hey, you guys are, you're sitting there in your paneled houses and you're lamenting the

fact that you put money into a bag with holes in it. You just can't make ends meet. You know, you're worried about why your crops are failing. Let me tell you, it's because you are sitting in paneled houses while God's house lies desolate. Get to work on his house and things will change." That's Haggai's message. Then after they'd been working a while, he feels the need to come back and say, "Take courage. Take courage." Remember three times, "Take courage. Take courage. Take courage." They need courage. Why? Because they encounter opposition. They're tempted to quit again but this time they have a prophet saying, "Take courage. Take courage. Take courage." They have a man of God with the word of God at the moment, at the point of their need and it makes all the difference.

Then you have Zechariah who comes and says his first oracle from the Lord, the word of the Lord appears to Zechariah in chapter 1, verse 1 and he says, "Repent," and the Lord returned to him and he will return to you. And then the next big section of Zechariah, chapter 1, verse 7, to chapter 6, verse 15, Zechariah recounts eight visions, eight prophetic visions. Zechariah is one of the more apocalyptic prophets in the Old Testament. He's like Daniel in that Zechariah, Daniel and Ezekiel are the ones that have the most apocalyptic symbolic kinds of visions that we see in Revelation, mirrored in Revelation where God is speaking, he's giving truth but through images that are symbols. And the point of the apocalyptic is – listen, this is very important – the point of apocalyptic literature or one of the main purposes is to open the eyes of God's people, to open the eyes of God's people to the reality of the spiritual world and all that is going on behind the scenes. The Lord is lifting the veil. That's why Revelation is actually one of the reasons it's called the Apocalypse is it actually means from out behind the veil, unveiled, uncovered.

So what's happening is the Lord is letting his people see things they cannot see with their physical eyes. Zechariah, the biggest part or the heart of his prophetic message is that kind of message where Haggai is just saying, "Look, look at your book, I mean, look at your budget, look at how things are working out, look at your house, look at your circumstances and realize God is disciplining you." And they needed that message. Very practical, straight forward, but more focused on what we can see. Given spiritual reasons for that, of course, it's a spiritual message. God is concerned with everyday life and with the decisions we make and the things we do. Yes, God is concerned with that but Zechariah comes giving a complementary message to this saying, "Listen, it's not just what your eyes can see that you need to be aware of. You need to be aware of what God is doing in heavenly places. You need to see, to have him do," remember the wonderful story from 2 Kings 6 where Elisha, remember Elisha and he's at Dothan, small town in Israel? He's been telling the king of Israel how to avoid the king of the Arameans, the King of the Arameans is trying to set an ambush for the king of Israel and Elisha will know what's happening and tell the king of Israel so he keeps escaping from every plan the king of the Arameans sets, every trap he sets for him, he confounds it. And so the king of the Arameans is saying, "Who, which one of you is a spy?" He's talking to his cabinet. "Who's the spy in here because every time we set a trap, have a great plan, and it comes to nothing." I'm adding some words here. But anyway, "I have a great plan, it comes to nothing. Which one of you has betrayed me?" And one of the guys there says,

"It's not us, O King, but the prophet Elisha knows what you say in your bedchamber. He knows stuff we don't know because he knows somehow from God."

Well, the king of the Arameans not being very astute spiritually, he decides he's gonna go try to kill Elisha so he surrounds Dothan where Elisha is and Elisha, it must be weather like we're having now, it's hot summer and so he's asleep on top of the roof hoping to catch a breeze, I guess, while he's sleeping probably up there. He's asleep on top of the roof with his servant and his servant is up in the morning making coffee. Again I'm adding a little bit to this, but his servant is up early and his servant as he's, you know, going around fixing things, he looks out, he's on top of the roof, he looks outside and he sees an army has gathered, like morning light is beginning to dawn, he sees an army surrounding the city. The Aramean army has surrounded this little town of Dothan. They are absolutely and utterly hopeless. There is no escape. There is no way out. And so in his alarm, he awakens Elisha and he says basically, "We are, we're dead meat! You've got to wake up and check this out, we are in trouble! You shouldn't have been doing all this stuff you've been doing about the king of the Arameans!" Again, I'm adding a little bit but that's essentially his emotional response.

And Elisha kind of waking up. "You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You." Elisha is not shaken. Elisha hears the report. He filters it through what he knows of God and he says, "There's no worry. Greater are those with us than those with them, than with our enemy." And his servant thinks, "I don't know. This is crazy. You need to look." And Elisha's like, "I don't need to look." I mean, he's just, you know, calm as a cucumber, cool as a cucumber and so he prays, "Lord, open the eyes of my servant." And in that instant the eyes of the servant are opened to see the invisible spiritual realities that are always there but that cannot be seen. They're always there but cannot be seen with human eyes.

The essence of faith, faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. We walk by faith, not by sight, right? And the things which are visible are temporal, the things which are invisible are eternal. The things which really are, are eternal and are invisible. They're not unreal things, they're real things, and so what happens is it's kind of like, you know, there are certain sounds that we don't hear because our ears don't, you know, go to that range. Dogs can hear things we can't hear. Other animals can hear things we can't hear. In the same sense, there's a sense in which our sight is limited. It cannot see what is out there in reality spiritually.

Elisha prays the prayer and God opens the eyes of his servant to see what is there and what he sees, Dothan is in the hill country, it's surrounded by, it's in a valley surrounded by hills and the Aramean army had completely filled the valley around Dothan. He saw that at first light. Now his eyes are opened and he sees that in every mountainside around Dothan encircling the Aramean army are the heavenly host of God, the heavenly armies of God have the Arameans surrounded. That's reality.

So when a prophet like we had these glimpses. God doesn't want us constantly thinking about the unseen world. I mean, yes, our love for him, yes, our walk with him, yes, but

not thinking about angels and all that, preoccupied all the time, or demons all the time. That's why Scripture doesn't talk about it that much. He wants you to live your life loving him in tangible ways with real people, ministering to real people, showing, shining the light of Christ to them on a daily basis. In fact, there's a helpful line in one of Lewis's books, I think it's actually "The Screwtape Letters," where he says that Satan's strategy, he wants people to either be completely preoccupied with him or to never think about him at all. He's happy with either extreme. I think there are some Christians, professing Christians who are looking for a demon behind every bush, telling you to rebuke things and all that kind of nonsense. The Bible doesn't teach that way of living. Neil Anderson, that kind of stuff, it's bunk. It's not biblical. Get rid of it. I'm telling you, it's not biblical. It's dangerous, not because you have to worry about demons but it's because it'll mess your mind up. It's gonna hurt your soul.

The Bible tells you enough about the spiritual world so that we know its reality and that we can be sober and vigilant, knowing that the devil is like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. We know he's there. We're not, you know, yawning through life. No, we're supposed to be sober and vigilant but we're not to be preoccupied with him, we're to be preoccupied with Jesus Christ and we're to be preoccupied with sharing Jesus Christ with real people who need him. But the Lord gives us these glimpses when we need them in the Scriptures to encourage us.

That's what happens in these eight visions Zechariah has. He has eight visions and I'm gonna summarize them in just about five minutes, I hope. Essentially the first vision and the eighth vision, what he sees in chapter 1 and chapter 6 is he sees these angelic beings on horses. His first vision begins, he sees a man, an angelic kind of man on a red horse and some others and they have come from, and he asked an angel, there's an angel interpreting for him all along what's happening and he asked the angel and the angel says, "These are those that the Lord has sent to patrol the whole earth." So there's this heavenly patrol and these horsemen are coming back to report to Yahweh, to the God of Israel, and it's interesting how the Lord, he bends his metaphors to help us and the people receiving this information, the folks that were living under the Persian reign and trying to rebuild the temple, knew that the Persian ruler, one of the great things that Cyrus did was he perfected their communications, routes, and he had fast horsemen that would report to him from all over, they would take the message out and bring the messages back. It's one of the things he did. He had the largest empire of any of the ancient world empires, more square miles under Persia than any of the others: Rome, Greece, Babylonian, Egyptian. He had the biggest and he was a genius. The Lord had blessed him even though he was an unbeliever, the Lord had blessed him and he had this system.

So they were used to seeing the king's errand people running messages back to the authorities and what is this saying to them? This is saying though we can't see it, who is the real Emperor of this world? Who is the one who's really in charge? He's the one who sends angels all over the earth to report back to him. Now the reality is God doesn't even need the angels but what he's showing us is he's speaking in a language we can understand. We have trouble understanding omniscience so he speaks in ways we can understand. He shows us and he does have angels all over the world and they do report

back to him. Though he doesn't need it, he still, that's part of how he ministers his kingdom.

So the point is God, and that happens in chapter 1 and chapter 6, it brackets the book of visions, heavenly patrol. God is in charge. Whether you can see it or not, O Israel, God is on the throne. Just like we sang, "Our God reigns." We look small and insignificant. We look around us, we don't have any resources. We don't have an army. We don't have any protection. Our God reigns and our God is glorified by not showing through earthly splendor but through humble means so that he can inspire faith. This is his way. It's always been his way. He chose Abraham, the nation of Israel who weren't that special, put them in Canaan which didn't appear to be that special. It didn't appear to be but it was and he made it. He worked through David. Remember David was the least likely of the sons. Remember Samuel goes to anoint one of Jesse's sons and he sees the first one, "That must be him." No, that's not him. He sees all six, "No. No. No. No. No." He's like, "The Lord told me to come here and anoint one of your sons. Do you have any other sons?" He says, "Yes, I have the youngest. He's out tending the sheep. I told him to keep the animals while we dealt with the real business here." "Go send for him." This young man, ruddy in complexion, that's the one. He doesn't look the most impressive, he's not taller than all the men like Saul was. No, what is different about him? It's something you can't see with your eyes. Samuel says in that moment, God said to him, "Man looks at the outer appearance but God looks on the heart." You see, it's what you can't see that matters.

It's always been that way and that's what Zechariah is telling them. "Listen, you think you have no resources, you think we don't have what we need, but we have the blessing of the God who reigns over every molecule in the universe, He is on our side, and if God is for us, who is against us?" That's the first and the last vision. The second and third and sixth and seventh, there's a chiasm going in here. The second and third and sixth and seventh mirror each other in a way. You have judgment of the nations and the blessing of Jerusalem in those two visions, two and three and then six and seven, and the idea there is that the nations are definitely gonna be judged. Though the people that are coming against you, the opposition's gonna come against you again and again and again for the rest of time until Jesus returns which is part of the message of these prophets and the message of Ezra-Nehemiah. It's not gonna get easy. But the fact that you will see great opposition outwardly, visibly, you have all of the support you need inwardly and spiritually. In fact, you have more support than you could ever imagine, more support than you could ever need but it's invisible.

In fact, it's an interesting thing, one of those visions in chapter 3 is he sees a man measuring Jerusalem. He's got a measuring tape and he's out measuring Jerusalem, measuring the wall. He's measuring what I think he needs measuring for the walls. "I need to know how big the city is." And he's working feverishly and one of the angels tells him to stop. "You don't need to build the walls." Why? "Because the Lord God is in Jerusalem and the Lord God is like a fire around Jerusalem. A wall of fire around Jerusalem." Now think about how specific that is to their need. Imagine you are one of the people wanting to build the wall, 15 years have lapsed, here comes Haggai and you're

like, "Yeah, we are, I agree we do need to get back to building. I'm convicted. I need to repent like Zechariah said in his first message." But now we need to hear the message, "Take courage. Take courage." Why? Because opposition has come again. Opposition has come again and we're in trouble and so we need to take courage and this would be, I think had to have been some of the discussion, "Guys, what we need to do first before we build the temple, is we need to build the walls. Doesn't that make sense? I mean, seriously, why would we build the temple before we build the walls? Building the walls, then we have security to build the temple." That seems like a very reasonable plan and I'm not saying that would be a bad plan in other circumstances except when God tells you to build the temple first. When God tells you to build the temple first, you don't build the walls. You build the temple first. That's what he's telling them through this vision. "Hey, stop the measuring, there needs to be no measuring for the walls. We're gonna get to that later. I am the wall of fire around Jerusalem." There's an invisible wall of fire around you when you are doing what God wants you to do. Nothing can stop you. Nothing can happen that will stop you from doing what God is calling you and equipping you to do. Nothing can stop you.

One of my favorite quotes from Stonewall Jackson who was a believer and he said this, think about this, to be a soldier, I mean, that's such a frightening concept. Most of us, some of you have served but most of us in America haven't served or been in combat, but for most of history people grew up having to do that. You had to fight just to protect your land from people coming raiding and marauding all the time. Well, think about how, you know, how terrifying the prospect of dying in battle is. This is what Stonewall Jackson said. He was a believer who had a high view of the sovereignty of God and he said this, "I'm as safe because of the providence of God, the governing rule of God, I am as safe on the battlefield with bullets whizzing around as I am at home asleep in my own bed." That is true. Now that doesn't appear to be true, does it? That's because we only see what we can see. It looks to me like bullets are flying around, this is not a good place to be, and if you find bullets flying around, that's not a good place to be. That's right. Normally that's true, unless God's told you to be there. And when you have a view that God is sovereign, even if you got there by accident or maybe ill-advisedly, still those bullets cannot touch you unless he wants them to.

One of the interesting things about great men, I like to read history, reading George Washington, Winston Churchill, Douglas Patton biographies, different biographies like that, the same thing would be true of, well, Douglas MacArthur, George Patton, both those of guys this would be true of, these great men had a sense of invincibility on the battlefield, calm under fire and I think it was because even though most of these guys were unbelievers, the Lord had put them in a place just like he did Cyrus and these other guys that are unbelievers, and he's kind of made them invincible and given them a work to do and until that work is done, they're indestructible. How much more true is that true of you if you belong to Jesus Christ? Until your work is done, you are indestructible.

So that's what this vision says. In fact, the last pair of visions in chapters 3 and 4, the middle four and five vision of the eight, remember there's eight visions, so it's 1-8, 2-3, 6-7, 4-5 mirror each other. Essentially the question is do we need, they would have been

asking, "Do we need new leaders?" And this is a very reasonable question. Zechariah and Joshua started out good but where are they now 15 years later? We need a new high priest and we need a new prince. Well, what the Lord says in chapters 3 and 4 is, "The problem isn't your leader because I'm gonna take care of that. Well, the problem is your leader but I'm gonna equip those leaders," and he sets Joshua apart and installs him as the high priest. Joshua has now been spiritually installed. "He's been cleansed. He is now the high priest that I want him to be." Zerubbabel, he says. "There's a mountain before Zerubbabel but not by might, nor by power but by my spirit," says the Lord. "This mountain is gonna become a plain in front of Zerubbabel." Zerubbabel is gonna be so powerful in his leadership that he's gonna knock down a mountain. That's the vision he has. God will equip the men he's called to lead you to be what he's called you to be.

You look at the outside, God looks at the heart. It seems too hard. Hey, this is a really powerful point. You know, we look at people that God has put in our lives to help us and it's not just leaders, it's just because we're supposed to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ, we're supposed to learn to listen to the people in our lives. I need to listen to my wife when she reproves me or shows me something she's concerned about. I need to listen to my children the same way. We all need to listen to anyone who loves the Lord and has the word of God and wants to share with us, and a lot of times what we're tempted to do, we realize we have darkness, we have confusion, disorder, we have emptiness that is there because we need the word of God spoken and a lot of times we're not listening to the word of God that God has put people around us who would speak to us if we would only listen to them, and one of the reasons we don't listen to them is we look at them on the outward and we says, "How could they possibly help me? Look at their life." And God says, "Stop looking." Read chapter 3, Joshua, he talks about he's in filthy garments and the Lord, because Joshua's a sinner but the Lord says, "Take off those filthy garments. Clothe him in a new set of garments." Puts a turban on his head and he anoints Joshua as his instrument.

Think about that when you're tempted not to listen to a believer that's trying to offer you correction. You look and you see the outward and the external and their problems, and they may need some correction from you too, but what you want to do is be trusting God that he's working and he's able to do beyond what you see with your eyes. Humility like that will be blessed and pride and arrogance will not. When you won't humble yourself before another believer, you will continue in your darkness and chaos, confusion and emptiness. You will reap what you sow. God has ordained that we learn through one another. He's ordained that we learn to hear and we always hear the word of God best with someone else helping us. It's reading a book that someone's written. It's hearing another person speak to you. And when it comes to the real deep issues of the heart, it's always got to be someone else helping us. I mean virtually always. The Lord does some things in spite of it but usually it's through another person telling you what you don't want to hear, maybe what you already know but you don't really want to apply.

So he pulls back the veil and he says, he's basically saying, "You're looking at the outward and you see we don't have the resources, we don't have the leadership, we don't have the people," and God says, "Look at Me. Stop looking at the limitations outwardly

and look at the vast infinitude of resources that are available to you spiritually." Ephesians 1:3, "He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Is that true or is it not? It is true. We need to act like that and believe it and trust.

The specificity, he comes exactly with what we need and when that comes, when the word of God is spoken to the need that you have exactly as you need it, it accomplishes its purpose. Now listen, it still doesn't make it easy. There are no quick fixes. God is not a microwave Christianity God. He does things over years, over interaction after interaction after interaction. He does it through apparently small things and yet what he's doing is if we could see spiritually, is he's moving mountains. He's leveling mountains one layer at a time if you will cooperate and I will cooperate with him.

The efficacy of the word, the third point. That was the specificity. The third point, the efficacy of the word. One of the things that's really neat and I think the text invites us to do, when we were teaching through chapter 4 and I was laboring through those three different historical periods, three things that are happening remember, I'm not going to go into that again at all right now, but one of the long account from 4:8 to 23, those 16 verses where there was an account of the specific opposition encountered by the people under Artaxerxes, and we're told about that and we're told what happens as a result of that. We're told that they opposed the building of the walls. They send a letter and the letter is slanderous, it's malicious, it's mean-spirited and the letter goes to the king and then the king responds to the letter, doing exactly what those mean-spirited evil people wanted done and he stops the work on the walls by force of arms. Why that full account of it? I think one of the reasons is so you can see chapter 4, read it right before you read chapter 5 into 6, because what you have is a contrast between the opposition that they experienced under Artaxerxes and the opposition they experienced under Darius.

What happens is and it's basically three points. You think about the reaction of the Jews. In chapter 4 when they're opposed, they stop the work. They are frightened, they're discouraged, they stop the work. In chapter 5 when they start the work up again, they're opposed again. Verse 3, "At that time Tattenai, the governor of the province beyond the River, and Shethar-bozenai and their colleagues came to them and spoke to them thus, 'Who issued you a decree to rebuild this temple and to finish this structure?' Then we told them accordingly what the names of the men were who were reconstructing this building." Listen to what he says next, though. They come saying the same thing, "What are you doing?" "But the eye of their God was on the elders of the Jews, and they did not stop them until a report could come to Darius, and then a written reply be returned concerning it." This time they didn't get discouraged and frightened and stop, what they did was they said, "We're gonna keep working," and somebody was over there negotiating the terms. It was like, "Hey, guys," maybe the work starts to stop, people are looking around, "What's happening?" You know, hammers stop, the saws stop, the bricklayers have stopped and it's like Zerubbabel and Joshua go back and say, "Get back to work. Don't stop. We've got this." And they go over and they start talking to the people. "Hey, we know you've got a concern. What we want you to do is if you will go and check with the Emperor and you'll get word that he wants us to stop, we'll stop but

we're not gonna stop until the Emperor tells us to." It's a different level of boldness. They're gonna wait. They're not gonna stop.

So that's one of the things you see. In fact, verse 8 says of chapter 5 when they replied or this is actually in the letter. When the letter is written, you can tell what the people of Israel did, the Jews. In verse 7 he says, "To Darius the king, all peace." This is Tattenai writing, "Let it be known to the king that we have gone to the province of Judah, to the house of the great God, which is being built with huge stones, and beams are being laid in the walls; and this work is going on with great care and is succeeding in their hands." Not only are they keeping on working but they're making great progress.

What accounts for the difference between the reaction of the Jews in chapter 4 and the reaction of the Jews in chapter 5? The word of God. Okay, so the reaction of the Jews is the first, this point 3, that was point 3A, the reaction of the Jews. The efficacy of the word, the reaction of the Jews. Efficacy of the word is 3, A is the reaction of the Jews. B. The ferocity of the opposition. There's a difference in the ferocity, the intensity of the opposition. 4:11-15, you see the first letter under Artaxerxes. Listen to what they said, "this is the copy of the letter which they sent to him: 'To King Artaxerxes: Your servants, the men in the region beyond the River, and now let it be known to the king that the Jews who came up from you have come to us at Jerusalem; they are rebuilding the rebellious and evil city and are finishing the walls and repairing the foundations. Now let it be known to the king, that if that city is rebuilt and the walls are finished, they will not pay tribute, custom or toll, and it will damage the revenue of the kings. Now because we are in the service of the palace, and it is not fitting for us to see the king's dishonor, therefore we have sent and informed the king, so that a search may be made in the record books of your fathers. And you will discover in the record books and learn that that city is a rebellious city and damaging to kings and provinces, and that they have incited revolt within it in past days; therefore that city was laid waste. We inform the king that if that city is rebuilt and the walls finished, as a result you will have no possession in the province beyond the River.'" This is intense opposition. They are malicious and slanderous to the nth degree in their letter they write. This is the officials.

Now look at chapter 5, what Tattenai says. We're comparing his letter in chapter 5 to what happened in chapter 4. He writes in verse 6, "This is the copy of the letter which Tattenai, the governor of the province beyond the River, sent to Darius the king." Verse 7 "To Darius the king, all peace. Let it be known to the king that we have gone to the province of Judah, to the house of the great God, which is being built with huge stones, and beams are being laid in the walls; and this work is going on with great care and is succeeding in their hands. Then we asked those elders and said to them thus, 'Who issued you a decree to rebuild this temple and to finish this structure?' We also asked them their names so as to inform you, and that we might write down the names of the men who were at their head." Pretty fair treatment so far, isn't it? "Hey, they're doing this. We're concerned about it, we think you may want to stop it, but this is what we did, this is what we said, this is what they said."

Verse 11, "Thus they answered us, saying," and here he gives the exact word-for-word answer, "We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth and are rebuilding the temple that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and finished. But because our fathers had provoked the God of heaven to wrath, He gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this temple and deported the people to Babylon. However, in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, King Cyrus issued a decree to rebuild this house of God." Etc. etc. He recounts exactly word-for-word what they said so they could bear testimony to the king too. The hearts of the opponents are different, do you see that?

What accounts for that? It's the invisible spiritual realities that we can't see. You say, "Well, Tattenai is a nicer guy than this other guy was, Rehum." Well, maybe so. Why? Why was he a nicer guy? Because God bends the hearts of the king to do whatever he wants. Proverbs 21:1, "The heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord, like a water course he channels it wherever he wishes." So also the heart of the governor or the heart of the city official.

So you see the reaction of the Jews, the ferocity of the opposition being different and response of the king, and I'll just have to summarize these and not read them for you. In chapter 4, the king hears that slanderous report that was ridiculous, I mean, it was absurd. "The Jews if you let them finish these walls, they're gonna take everything from the Euphrates River, you're gonna lose everything." I mean, that's like something you would hear on some kind of crazy, you know, I can't even think about it, it's something on the internet that would just be bizarre. It's ridiculous but the king hears it, he does some research he finds out, "Well, yeah, some of what they said is true. Stop the work immediately." He sends back, "You go there right now and stop them from doing it." He listens completely to that slanderous report and he acts that way.

What happens in chapter 5? Here Tattenai, I think he's kind of a politician, Tattenai actually, and he's thinking, "I need, we need to stop this work but I've gotta hedge my bets. I don't know, Darius may be wanting this to happen so I'm just gonna report clearly what's happening and then I'll be okay either way." He's thinking about his neck and so he writes that, he sends it to him, Darius does a search and we're told in verse 2 of chapter 6, "In Ecbatana in the fortress, which is in the province of Media, a scroll was found and there was written in it as follows: 'Memorandum.'" He receives the report in Susa, his capital city, this request, search and see if a decree was issued by Cyrus, and what the terms were. Ecbatana is a small town that Cyrus visited one time the first year he was king. It's an outlier town where he vacationed apparently one summer, the first year of his reign, and it was apparently in that town that he issued the full decree and Darius was so diligent to find out, to search the matter out, that he sent his people all over to find out and they found out and they found the full text of the decree and it was better than what the people in Judah even knew. Why did the king go to that much trouble? Why did they find it? Because there is a God in heaven who reigns and rules over all things and what he says will happen, will happen.

So the difference here between the reaction of the Jews, the ferocity of the opposition, the response to the king, of the king, it's all the word of God changes everything. You go from this terrible bleak circumstance, the word of God comes, and look at the victory. This is saying to us, what do we need? We need the word of God. Disorder, chaos, confusion, emptiness, darkness, hopelessness, areas of our lives where we feel like we're never gonna change, things are never gonna be better, maybe in your relationship, you've lost hope, maybe in your marriage you're just living and running parallel lines that don't intersect, can it change? It can't change, you feel like. There are so many wounds. There's so much mess. You look at it and it's confusion and disorder and chaos and darkness. You tried before, you tried so many times and the work has come to a standstill and you look at it now and your heart is not even willing to hope that it could be different. Humanly speaking, you and I when we think like that, humanly speaking we're right if we're just looking at what we can see with our eyes. Yeah, there's nothing in you and me that can change it but we need to pray like Elisha prayed, "Lord, open my eyes to the resources that are around me. Open my eyes to You, the God who is the Lord of hosts, the Lord of the heavenly armies. Nothing is too hard for You. And what I need is to put myself under Your word so that Your word can begin to come into that disorder and chaos and darkness and formlessness and emptiness, and it can begin to bring form and structure and little by little it'll bring form where there was chaos and it will bring fullness." It'll bring form and it will bring fullness and it won't happen on our timetable. It's gonna take time because God is glorified in doing things over time, that's just his way and it's more wonderful. We wish we could just go and just like, bam, be changed and we can then just go around and share with everybody how much we've been changed. God occasionally does things like that but it's really more occasional. What he normally does is he changes people little by little; what he does is he helps you set your mind on the things above, not on the things below, discipline yourself to think God's thoughts after you, change the way you think, change what you value, develop new habits, and with other people helping you see what you need to work on, helping you pick through the mess, little by little order comes, little by little fullness comes, little by little change comes and then when you look at a person from here and you look at a person five years ago, you say, "The Lord has done it and it is marvelous in our eyes. Look what God has done. That was a mountain that has been leveled." It happens so slowly, almost imperceptibly but it happened, nonetheless.

"Not by might nor by power but by My Spirit, says the Lord." And the Spirit uses the word of the living God and God is saying to you and to me, "Don't settle for the darkness." When God is showing us an area that needs to be worked on what he's saying is, "Work on it." He's saying like Haggai said, "Do you see the discipline in your life? Do you see the things that God is allowing you to suffer in? Stop suffering. Get to work." And Zechariah is saying, "And as you get to work, don't forget to look to the spiritual resources you have. The Spirit of God, the word of God, the people of God. The people of God that look like they can't help you." The reality is that if any of us knew the people that you feel the best about, that you think have it together, if you really saw them you wouldn't be so impressed. But it doesn't matter what they're like and where they're not exactly where they need to be because they're a project too that God is working on and he

probably wants to use you to help them after they help you. But the spiritual resources of heaven are nothing to laugh at.

So the Lord is saying, "Build. Build one another. Build for the glory of God." It all happens through Jesus Christ and one of those beautiful things is Joshua, the high priest who it says in chapter 3, he was clothed in filthy garments, then he's given clean garments and he's reinstated as high priest, and then later a crown is put on his head, you don't put a crown on the high priest's head, the crown is for the king's head. One of the things going on Zechariah and I encourage you to read it, is Christ is being hinted at and lifted up. Zechariah 3:10 or 11 he says this, he says, "Joshua, I have appointed you and the ones around you but there's coming one called the Branch and through Him I will remove your iniquities in a single day." You see, even the circumstances that they were going through God used to reveal the glory of Christ. What we need is a Savior who can cleanse us ultimately and forever. We need to long for him even as we do what God's called us to do, keep working day by day, and so you and I are called to keep working day by day but to keep looking at Christ, the one who took our sins out of the way in a single day, the one who rose again from the dead, the one who is mighty to save, and the one who is coming back, and as we keep working day after day, year after year until he comes, faithfully trusting his word, delivering his word, putting ourselves under his word, meditating on his word, we do that, he's transforming us into his image little by little and when he comes back he's going to say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." May that day come quickly.

Let's pray together.

*Father, how grateful we are for Your word, that it is that which brings salvation, it's that which saves us from the penalty of sin when we place our faith in Christ and trust Him and surrender to Him, place all of our trust in His finished work, saved forever from the wrath of God, the penalty of our sin, and it's that word of God which continues to save us from the power of sin. It speaks into our darkness, into our chaos and it brings order and fullness and light and life and it's that word of God which will one day save us from the presence of sin when Jesus, when the angel shouts and Jesus comes back. Father, be glorified, make Your word go forth in our lives in a whole new way. Help us be people who really believe and show our faith by our actions that we are really people who trust in the power of the word of God, and we ask You to do this for the glory of Your Son. We pray in His name. Amen.*